

MONDAY APRIL 5 1 Corinthians 15:12-19 – no resurrection?

12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.

16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.

17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.

19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

When I was training for ordination in the 1990's, we had a memorable week in college with a dynamic and somewhat fiery Christian leader from the Indian subcontinent. He told us the story of a visit to England he had made, when he had been invited to preach in a certain parish church on Easter Sunday. He talked to the children. 'What does Easter mean?' he asked them. They called out various answers, all to do with Easter eggs and fluffy bunnies. My Indian friend was horrified. 'I gave them hell!' he told us. I can only hope he was addressing the parents at this point and not the children!

But I do find it as disappointing as he did that many of us don't really seem to see Easter as terribly important. The implications of the resurrection of the Lord are enormous. I remember the tragic death of a young man in the parish where I lived back in the 1970's. Apparently he had blacked out while driving his car; the crash that followed was fatal. I visited the bereaved family shortly after; they lived just around the corner from my house. 'I don't believe there's anything after death' the father said to me, and it showed on his face. He died a year later; I have always wondered if he died of a broken heart.

Enter Paul, devoting a whole long chapter 15 in his first letter to the Christians in Corinth to the Lord's resurrection. The Christian faith is a resurrection faith, he insists. If there's no resurrection, we deserve not admiration but pity. And the reason he writes so strongly is that, at the beginning of the chapter, he can list all the people who had seen the risen Jesus in the period that followed the first Easter day. In that culture, eye witness testimony was supremely important. That there were all these eye witnesses to the resurrection still alive and kicking some twenty years after the event was a powerful argument.

So I'm devoting this final week of daily reflections to the theme of resurrection. All sorts of things follow from our Lord's rising from the tomb. The gospels spell some of them out, and we'll be hearing about those in church services during the next few Sundays. Many of the letters that make up a large part of the New Testament spell out others, and that's where I'm going to dwell this week.

But someone might object: I don't want to be told I'm going to heaven when I die; I'm more concerned about a faith that means something in the here and now! Absolutely right. All the more reason for journeying with Paul through these next few days, because he would agree with you.